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ABSTRACT

Most freshman composition textbooks promote one discourse structure, usually stressing early placement of the points of an essay. This can lock rapidly changing writers into composing according to only one format. In addition, adhering to a prescribed structure rather than focusing on meaning too often causes structure--not meaning--to control the discourse. In a study comparing the effectiveness of essays incorporating the thesis statement at the beginning with essays in which the thesis point is spread throughout or placed at the end, 30 teachers of English, social science, and life sciences evaluated one of four versions of each of two freshman essays. Most teachers agreed that the essays with points distributed throughout were more persuasive than those with the thesis stated at the beginning. Truncated and slightly longer versions of these same essays were similarly evaluated by college students, who indicated whether their opinion of the paper changed from version to version and how. Most students did not perceive discourse structure as the teachers had, but their responses showed that they blurred the distinction between opinion and fact perpetuated by composition textbooks. The results suggest that the emphasis when teaching argumentation should be on point distribution throughout an essay rather than point placement at the beginning or end because point distribution leads writers to greater versatility in discourse. (Copies of the essays are included.) (SRT)

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Readers, Writers and Thesis Distribution

O. Alan Weltzien

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The lag between the textbook industry and research in composition often bears unfortunate consequences, particularly when the former reinforces notions that research increasingly calls into question. For example, my impression is that most of our freshman comp texts not only stress point placement, but favor early point placement, in the short argumentative essay assignment.[1] The student writing a 600-word piece exploring a particular position hears that his best rhetorical strategy consists in placing his claim early, then supporting it. Such advice is as unsurprising as it is misleading.

It misleads to the degree that it locks rapidly changing writers into one general discourse structure. For developing writers, of course, the discovery of one's point seems tantamount to producing the discourse. The formulaic opening paragraph--or rarely, paragraphs--serves as a catalyst and an anchor, as it distills the activity of invention and constrains its expression.

But for many, the anchor becomes a bottleneck and the former aid, an inhibition. The received discourse structure controls text meaning rather than the other way around. This dilemma derives from adhering to a general paradigm and so-called "rules" rather than focussing on the potentiality of meaning in a particular discourse. A few years back, Nancy Sommers documented the bottleneck while studying differences between novice and experienced writers:

> Since [students] write their introductions and their thesis statements even before they have really discovered what they want to say, their early close attention to the thesis statement, and more generally the linear model [of the composition process], function to restrict and circumscribe not only the development of their ideas, but also their ability to change the direction of these ideas.[2]

More recently, Arthur Applebee's research confirms the strain our textbooks and pedagogy impose upon students in the introductory sections of their discourse:

> The overall developmental pattern that emerged was one of students gradually learning the requirements of different patterns of organization, and, once having learned and found safety in a particular format, adhering to it as closely as possible..... [The students they studied] drafted in top-down fashion, struggling over the first paragraph and moving with greater ease through the rest of the process.[3]

Of course, introductions pose special challenges because of their precedence in both the process and product of drafting. Novices acclimating themselves in universes of discourse prevalent in college and elsewhere adhere to the structure familiar to them, even as it frustrates their composing.

Research on connections between cognitive development and structures of discourse suggests the inevitability of this bottleneck. No shortcuts may exist. If thinking and writing entail the gradual discovery of one's point, the concentrated introductory paragraph neatly records it and, sometimes, outlines its support. But our aim, presumably, is to teach the flexibility, rather than the rigidity, of this broadly conceived mode of writing. In so doing, we encourage students to depart from the familiar structure in the process of trying out more complex rhetorical strategies.

As is well known, revision implies a minimal and delayed range of activity for novice writers, and a sharply contrary range for veterans. One way to educate the novices and push them to a more extensive understanding of development in discourse is to replace the principle of point <u>placement</u> with point <u>distribution</u>. It isn't just where you locate your point, but how you undergird it, that accounts for adequately developed discourse. In applying

this principle, students shift the locus of meaning from the opening paragraph across their discourse. Having learned to concentrate their point up front, they then learn to spread it.

More than placement, point distribution in a discourse emphasizes context: thinking through the point, enlarging its meaning by exposing it to a variety of applications. Joe Williams, advocating inductive discourse structures featuring late point placement, speaks, I believe, to the value of distribution:

> This kind of inductive [point-last] organization requires a much higher level of rhetorical skill, a much more self-conscious control over the development of the paper, than the more conventional kind of organization. The student must still announce a plausible sub-point of some kind toward the end of the opening paragraph, but in so doing must anticipate that it has to lead to the real point of the paper. The student must begin to anticipate the real point and continuously set up the argument rather than retrospectively support it.[4]

Delaying the position of one's point requires a preparatory set of clauses, or frame, that adumbrates it. Such provisional points may prompt development in a way that point-early discourse does not.

Perhaps the developing essayist is one who gradually delays his point in his discourse, so that it migrates downward, becoming part of his most recent, rather than most distant, text. At the least, he learns to distribute as well as place his point. Strongly framed discourse, that is, requires posts and beams. By "posts" I mean drafts of one's point, the skeleton of the discourse, its superstructural cues; by "beams" I mean linkages between posts, roughly analoguous to the text's macropropositions. Just as building construction depends upon well-conceived vertical and horizontal joints, so the construction of meaning in discourse depends upon adequate frames.

An analysis of discourse frames--what Colomb and Williams label the lexico-semantic framework[5]--enables the researcher to study the conjunction of posts and beams with global meaning. Specifically, extracting a discourse's frame and then studying the discourse in progressive increments lets one assess the changing relation of developing meaning to finished, retrospective meaning. An essay with sufficient closure probably contains a well-distributed point; un- or under-developed discourse probably reveals a weak frame.

Of course, such a method of analysis occurs very much after the fact. Readers reading depend upon superstructural cues to pattern meaning retrospectively more than prospectively. The research of Gary Olson, Robert Mack, and Susan Duffy confirms readers' generally passive, retrospective set:

> the reader of an essay has general expectations about the overall structure of the argument, comparison, or other point being made in the essay. The reader quickly recognizes the type of point being made, and at a general level is sensitive to the organizing devices in the surface structure of the essay. However... [he] does not appear to engage in rich hypothesis generation and testing. The reader seems to adopt a more passive strategy, waiting for each new item of information to be presented and trying to fit it into the overall scheme of the argument... the reader of the essay appears to adopt a <u>retrospective</u> orientation. Each new element in the essay is related to earlier elements. There is little anticipation of what is coming up, except at the most general level.[6]

This statement belittles the phenomenology of prediction, but it testifies to the need for framed discourse. Readers stand as the silent, deferential partner in the collaborative enterprise of constructing meaning, depending as they do upon the writer's cues.

"Post" sentences serve a crucial organizational function, as they confirm or re-direct the patterns of meaning a reader proposes. Too, they illustrate the writer's treatment of his point in some sequence of local contexts. They

propel the reader towards a sense of closure. A discourse contains enough posts if, by its end, the reader feels the writer has sufficiently and adequately treated its point. A frame, linking superstructure with macrostructure, reduces a point's potential meaning to some measure of actual meaning. Point distribution poses a sound concept to evaluate the tradeoff between potential and actual meaning in discourse.

I have centered some recent research on this concept and linked it to issues of comprehension and evaluation. The original forms of Essays A and B had been submitted by first-semester freshmen. Essay A, ironically, was written about two months before the space shuttle disaster. I cleaned both of mechanical errors, made a few stylistic changes, and in a few spots, enlarged their frames, after which I created four versions of each. The originals most resembled the fourth versions.

A1

I was always excited from watching a space mission when I was a kid, dreaming of being in a mission someday. I always thought it was funny, seeing the astronauts walking to the van, the one that would take them to the launch pad. They tipped from side to side because they wore big, bulky white suits, which were made from high grade technology. There would be a flash of light from the cameras belonging to the press as the astronauts left for the van.

But the coverage didn't end there, for you could watch them going up an elevator that would take them to the space capsule, located at the top of the rocket. This used to be the scene for every launch of a manned space mission, before the space shuttle came along.

Today the space shuttle has broadened the horizons for many scientists. Maybe the press is responsible for this and other changes. The press used to cover a manned space flight months before it happened, going into every detail about the mission, and all about the lives of the astronauts who would be going up. People enjoyed watching aerial views of the big rocket on the launch pad, because those big rockets didn't take off every month, so it was always special. When the astronauts were in space, the cameras were always

rolling, taking photographs of the astronauts as they brushed their teeth or whatever people thought was funny.

However, when the shuttle goes up, the only coverage the astronauts get is when they fix a satellite inside the cargo bay of the shuttle. People aren't as familiar with the astronauts who go up, mainly because so many go into space, and then just do ordinary maneuvers inside the shuttle while circling around the earth.

During the Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, and Apollo-Soyez missions, the taxpayer didn't too much mind paying for the space program, for it had a main goal, which was to land a man on the moon by the end of the Sixties. It was a long term goal, but everyone was enthusiastic about doing it, and accomplishing the goal before the Russians. This, of course, was the space race, which brought a lot of pressure on every Apollo mission to succeed--no questions asked. This was when an astronaut was thought of as a hero, with the best job in the world.

Today, some of the space missions bring protest by people from the U. S. and abroad, because of what the government wants to do in space, for example build killer satellites. Now the astronauts also get a lot of abuse from the people at home, because they are a part of the whole scheme known as duty to the country, not only to oneself. This adds pressure to a difficult but proud job.

A2

I was always excited from watching a space mission when I was a kid, dreaming of being in a mission someday. I always thought it was funny, seeing the astronauts walking to the van, the one that would take them to the launch pad. They tipped from side to side because they wore big, bulky white suits, which were made from high grade technology. There would be a flash of light from the cameras belonging to the press as the astronauts left for the van.

But the coverage didn't end there, for you could watch them going up an elevator that would take them to the space capsule, located at the top of the rocket. This used to be the scene for every launch of a manned space mission, before the space shuttle came along.

Today, the space shuttle has broadened the horizon for many scientists. But the astronauts don't get the royal treatment anymore, and their jobs tend to be less important than before, [though they should be getting more coverage to make them feel it was, and still is, worth it.]

Maybe the press is the cause of this. The press used to cover a manned space flight months before it happened, going into every detail about the mission, and all about the lives of the astronauts who would be going up. People enjoyed watching aerial views of the big rocket on the launch pad, because those big rockets didn't take off every month, so it was always special. When the astronauts were in space, the cameras were always rolling, taking photographs of the astronauts as they brushed their teeth or whatever people thought was funny.

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Today, some of the space missions bring protest by people from the U. S. and abroad, because of what the government wants to do in space, for example, build killer satellites. Now the astronauts also get a lot of abuse from the people at home, because they are a part of the whole scheme known as duty to the country, not only to oneself. This adds pressure to a difficult but proud job.

A3

I was always excited from watching a space mission when I was a kid, dreaming of being in a mission someday. I always thought it was funny, seeing the astronauts walking to the van, the one that would take them to the launch pad. They tipped from side to side because they wore big, bulky white suits, which were made from high grade technology. There would be a flash of light from the cameras belonging to the press as the astronauts left for the van.

But the coverage didn't end there, for you could watch them going up an elevator that would take them to the space capsule, located at the top of the rocket. This used to be the scene for every launch of a manned space mission, before the space shuttle came along.

Today the space shuttle has broadened the horizons for many scientists. The press used to cover a manned space flight months before it happened, going into detail about the mission, and all about the lives of the astronauts who would be going up. People enjoyed watching aerial views of the big rocket on the launch pad, because those big rockets didn't take off every month, so it was always special. When the astronauts were in space, the cameras were always rolling, taking photographs of the astronauts as they brushed their teeth or whatever people thought was funny.

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During the Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, and Apollo-Soyez missions, the taxpayer didn't too much mind paying for the space program, for it had a main goal, which was to land a man on the moon by the end of the Sixties. It was a long term goal, but everyone was enthusiastic about doing it, and accomplishing the goal before the Russians. This, of course, was the space race, which brought a lot of pressure on every Apollo mission to succeed--no questions asked. This was when an astronaut was thought of as a hero, with the best job in the world.

Today, some of the space missions bring protest by people from the U. S. and abroad, because of what the government wants to do in space, for example, build killer satellites. Now the astronauts also get a lot of abuse from the people at home, because they are a part of the whole scheme known as duty to the country, not only to oneself. This adds pressure to a difficult but proud job. [The astronauts don't get the royal treatment anymore, and their jobs tend to be less important than before, but [they should be getting more coverage to make them feel it was, and still is, worth it.]

A4

I was always excited from watching a space mission when I was a kid, dreaming of being in a mission someday. Everyone felt a keen excitement, as if we had a direct stake in it. I always thought it was funny, seeing the astronauts walking to the van, the one that would take them to the launch pad. They tipped from side to side because they wore big, bulky white suits, which were made from high grade technology. There would be a flash of light from the cameras belonging to the press as the astronauts left for the van.

But the coverage didn't end there, for you could watch them going up an elevator that would take them to the space capsule, located at the top of the rocket. This used to be the scene for every launch of a manned space mission, before the space shuttle came along.

Today, the space shuttle has broadened the horizon for many scientists, but for the viewer like you and me, we can no longer feel the excitement of a space mission. The press used to cover a manned space flight months before it happened, going into every detail about the mission, and all about the lives of the astronauts who would be going up. People enjoyed watching aerial views of the big rocket on the launch pad, because those big rockets didn't take off every month, so it was always special. When the astronauts were in space, the cameras were always rolling, taking photographs of the astronauts as they brushed their teeth or whatever people thought was funny.

However, when the shuttle goes up, the only coverage the astronauts get is when they fix a satellite inside the cargo bay of the shuttle. People aren't as familiar with the astronauts who go up, mainly because so many go into space, and then just do ordinary maneuvers inside the shuttle while circling around the earth. Does this mean that the space missions will get less air time, unless something goes wrong? Should our interest and attention continue to decrease?

During the Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, and Apollo-Soyez missions, the taxpayer didn't too much mind paying for the space program, for it had a main goal, which was to land a man on the moon by the end of the Sixties. It was a long term goal, but everyone was enthusiastic about doing it, and accomplishing the goal before the Russians. This, of course, was the space race, which brought a lot of pressure on every Apollo mission to succeed--no questions asked. This was when an astronaut was thought of as a hero, with the best job in the world.

Today's astronauts aren't looked upon as heroes anymore, just followers. Some of the space missions bring protest by people from the U. S. and abroad, because of what the government wants to do in space, for example, build killer satellites. Now the astronauts also get a lot of abuse from the people at home, because they are a part of the whole scheme known as duty to the country, not only to oneself. This adds pressure to a difficult but proud job. [The astronauts don't get the royal treatment anymore, and their jobs

tend to be less important than before, but [they should be getting more coverage to make them feel it was, and still is, worth it.]

It seems as if the space mission has turned from a high adventure to another business. The future is here, but surprisingly boring. Something glamorous and valuable has disappeared from our common cause, and we should try and get it back.

B1

Still and stand hunting are the two methods used for hunting deer. Today, only a small percentage of successful still hunters exists. Because most of us don't have the skill to be a still hunter, we turn to the easier method of stand hunting.

The procedure for stand hunting is relatively simple, yet it does take skill to be a good stand hunter. The hunter picks a spot and waits for the deer to come to him. He has to be able to sit and stay quiet for long hours at a time. If you don't think that is hard, try it sometime.

The element of surprise is one of the reasons people choose to stand hunt. Also, a lot of deer will be spooked by hunters moving, and the deer might run into the stand hunter's area. Stand hunting remains popular because it is easier than still hunting and because of the increasing number of hunters in the November woods. Being confined to a small area proves the big disadvantage to stand hunting. Since deer are most active during morning and evening, the best time to stand hunt is at these hours.

Still hunting combines stand hunting with movement. The hunter moves slowly through the woods, stopping every few steps, listening and looking for any sign of life. It is best to wait about five minutes between the time you stop moving and the time you start again.

In still hunting, the hunter has to train himself to see the deer before the deer sees him. This is hard because you rarely see a whole deer. You have to look for a part of the deer. Sometimes all you might see is a horn in the brush or the flickering of the deer's tail. You have to study the area you are in very closely. A lot of the time, the deer will see you first and if this happens, you will see only the white flag (tail) going through the woods.

Also, the hunter has to learn to walk through the woods with as little noise as possible. This is very hard to do because if you have ever walked through dry leaves, you know the noise they make. Because it is hard to walk through the woods quietly, most hunters prefer to still hunt when the ground is covered with snow or wet from rain. The best still hunters, though, can be successful when the ground is dry or wet.

People still hunt because they don't like to sit and wait for the deer to come to them. When still hunting, the hunter can cover more land than the

stand hunter. This gives the hunter the chance to see more deer, but he might have to make a quick shot or pass up a shot because the deer saw or heard the hunter coming.

Still and stand hunting for deer are both effective methods though stand hunting is more popular due to its greater ease and the steady increase in hunters. Whichever method you choose, always be alert to see the deer before it see you.

Still and stand hunting are the two methods used for hunting deer. [Stand hunting is a method which any hunter can master fairly well, but still hunting is an art that can only be mastered through hours of practice.] Hard work leads to proficiency and a sense of distinction. Today, only a small percentage of successful still hunters exists. Because most of us don't have the skill to be a still hunter, we turn to the easier method of stand hunting.

The procedure for stand hunting is relatively simple, yet it does take skill to be a good stand hunter. The hunter picks a spot and waits for the deer to come to him. He has to be able to sit and stay quiet for long hours at a time. If you don't think that is hard, try it sometime.

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Still and stand hunting for deer are both effective methods though stand hunting is more popular due to its greater ease and the steady increase in

hunters. Whichever method you choose, always be alert to see the deer before it see you.

B3

Still and stand hunting are the two methods used for hunting deer. Today, only a small percentage of successful still hunters exists. Because most of us don't have the skill to be a still hunter, we turn to the easier method of stand hunting.

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Also, the hunter has to learn to walk through the woods with as little noise as possible. This is very hard to do because if you have ever walked through dry leaves, you know the noise they make. Because it is hard to walk through the woods quietly, most hunters prefer to still hunt when the ground is covered with snow or wet from rain. The best still hunters, though, can be successful when the ground is dry or wet.

People still hunt because they don't like to sit and wait for the deer to come to them. When still hunting, the hunter can cover more land than the stand hunter. This gives the hunter the chance to see more deer, but he might have to make a quick shot or pass up a shot because the deer saw or heard the hunter coming.

Still and stand hunting for deer are both effective methods, though stand hunting is more popular due to its greater ease and the steady increase in hunters. [While most anyone can become proficient in stand hunting, still hunting is an art that can only be mastered through hours of practice.] If

you are looking for a challenge, try it; it is hard to master, but if you apply yourself consistently, you might become an elite hunter with special skills. Whichever method you choose, always be alert to see the deer before it sees you.

B4

Still and stand hunting are the two methods used for hunting deer. [Stand hunting is a method which any hunter can master fairly well, but still hunting is an art that can only be mastered through hours of practice.] Hard work leads to proficiency and a sense of distinction. Today, only a small percentage of successful still hunters exists. Because most of us don't have the skill to be a still hunter, we turn to the easier method of stand hunting.

The procedure for stand hunting is relatively simple, yet it does take skill to be a good stand hunter. The hunter picks a spot and waits for the deer to come to him. He has to be able to sit and stay quiet for long hours at a time. If you don't think that is hard, try it sometime.

The element of surprise is one of the reasons people choose to stand hunt. Also, a lot of deer will be spooked by hunters moving, and the deer might run into the stand hunter's area. Stand hunting remains popular because it is easier than still hunting and because of the increasing number of hunters in the November woods. Being confined to a small area proves the big disadvantage to stand hunting. Since deer are most active during morning and evening, the best time to stand hunt is at these hours.

Still hunting takes a lot of practice and skill to be successful at. It combines stand hunting with movement. The hunter moves slowly through the woods, stopping every few steps, listening and looking for any sign of life. It is best to wait about five minutes between the time you stop moving and the time you start again.

In still hunting, the hunter has to train himself to see the deer before the deer sees him. This is hard because you rarely see a whole deer. You have to look for a part of the deer. Sometimes all you might see is a horn in the brush or the flickering of the deer's tail. You have to study the area you are in very closely. A lot of the time, the deer will see you first and if this happens, you will see only the white flag (tail) going through the woods.

Also, the hunter has to learn to walk through the woods with as little noise as possible. This is very hard to do because if you have ever walked through dry leaves, you know the noise they make. Because it is hard to walk through the woods quietly, most hunters prefer to still hunt when the ground is covered with snow or wet from rain. The best still hunters, though, can be successful when the ground is dry or wet.

People still hunt because they don't like to sit and wait for the deer to come to them. They feel it more challenging to go out and find the deer. When still hunting, the hunter can cover more land than the stand hunter. This gives the hunter the chance to see more deer, but he might have to make a quick shot or pass up a shot because the deer saw or heard the hunter coming.

Still and stand hunting for deer are both effective methods, though stand hunting is more popular due to its greater ease and the steady increase in hunters. If you are looking for a challenge, though, try still hunting; it is hard to master, but if you apply yourself consistently, you might become an elite hunter with special skills. Whichever method you choose, always be alert to see the deer before it sees you.

Both discourses work contrastively. Essay A carried the appropriate title, "Is the excitement gone?"; Essay B was untitled. Most would agree that A4 seems a stronger piece than B4: stronger because more suggestive, more probing in its cause-effect analysis, more moving in its nostalgia. Of perhaps greater interest, it represents point-late discourse, whereas B4 illustrates point-early discourse. Its subsequent posts are both fewer and more repetitive. Too, if we consider theouter pair of paragraphs in B4 as a frame, then the final paragraph becomes wholly recapitulating. In discourse this short, the conclusion-as-repeated-point discloses a familiar thinness of texture.

One might advise the writer of Essay B to exploit the potentiality of the claim, "still hunting is an art that can only be mastered," much more than has been the case. While his detailing seems effective, he ends by recommending, rather than further evaluating the meaning of the differences between the two modes of deer hunting. From the vantage of the end, B4 turns practical and requests action, whereas A4 requests speculation and perhaps a change in attitude.

From the "enhanced" originals I first isolated each essay's frame:

Essay A, frame

1) PP1 "Everyone felt a keen excitement, as if we had a direct stake in it."

2) PP3 "for the viewer like you and me, we can no longer feel the excitement of a space mission."

3) PP4 "[will the space missions get] less air time, unless something goes wrong? Should our interest and attention continue to decrease?"

4) PP6 "Today's astronauts aren't looked upon as heroes anymore, just followers."

5) PP6 "The astronauts don't get the [royal treatment] anymore."

6) PP6 "their jobs tend to be less important than before."

7) PP6 "they should be getting more coverage to make them feel it was, and still is, worth it."

8) PP7 "the space program has turned from [a high adventure] to another business. The future is here, but it is surprisingly boring."

9) PP7 "Someting glamorous and valuable has disappeared from our common cause, and we should try and get it back."

Essay B, frame

1) PP1, "Stand hunting is a method which any hunter can master fairly well, but still hunting is an art that can only be mastered through hours of practice. Hard work leads to proficiency and a sense of distinction."

2) PP4, "Still hunting takes [a lot of practice and skill] to be successful at."

3) PP7, "They feel that it is more challenging to go out and find the deer."

4) PP8, "If you are looking for [a challenge], though, try still hunting."

5) PP8, "It is hard to master, but if you apply yourself consistently, you might become an elite hunter with special skills."

Each successive post represents some synthesis of new meaning with meaning carried over from the preceding. Each functions as a superstructural cue, capturing the gist of some sentences or paragraphs surrounding it; a reader's rolling macrostructure derives, for the most part, from such frames. In Essay A I believe the point, or strongest post, to be the seventh one, late but not last in the essay; in Essay B the first post constitutes the point.

In both discourses, the writer constrains the reader's constructions through these sequences of posts. Text meaning is not tantamount to these frames, but they play the major role in shaping it, as the act of interpretation centers on them. Let's look more closely at the blending of old and new meaning in the posts, since such scrutiny opens the possibility of judging the quality of point distribution in both pieces.

The second post of Essay A speaks to the loss of excitement in contemporary space missions, which Colomb and Williams would label the issue of the discourse. The third-two questions extends this notion: a major source of "the excitement" is the media, and an occasion for excitement would be disaster rather than the routine. The fourth post introduces substantially new meaning, which the next two extend. Among other qualifications, heroes are leaders who earn the esteem reserved for royalty; above all else, however, former conditions jar with current.

The writer explores the contrast as he prepares us for his point, which ties directly back to the third post. Herein, of course, lies his major comment, a conviction about the extraordinary role of the astronaut celebrated, among other places, in Tom Wolfe's best seller. The final posts recapitulate the earlier seven, as they contain both his analysis of the problem and proposal. To the degree that the writer has used an inductive shape effectively, he progressively invites closure. Two thirds of the posts fall within the final two paragraphs.

By contrast, in the deductive Essay B, the posts seem well distributed, though the point is less effectively treated than in A. As I have said, this discourse could further develop its point: the art of still hunting, the notion of mastery, and the distinction felt by the still hunter. The second

post ("a lot of practice and skill") repeats part of the first ("through hours of practice") without adding to it. The third post adds new meaning by contextualizing the second: one way to understand "practice and skill" is to accept this "challenge." This idea opens out new avenues of implication and enlarges the overall contrast within the discourse. But the fourth post virtually repeats it, and the final one (elitism, special skills) recapitulates rather than extends the first. So the writing teacher ends thinking more about what the writer might have said rather than what he did say.

I do not mean to suggest that these are the only possible frames for these discourses. Different analyses might produce different frames. For example, one might include as another post in Essay A the sentence common to all versions: "This was when an astronaut was thought of as a hero, with the best job in the world." This sentence contains the essay's first use of that connotatively rich term, "hero," that crystallizes, to some considerable degree, the gathering implications of the contrast.

Extracting some frame from a discourse validates the more complex notion of point distribution, and allows the researcher to pose questions tying comprehension and evaluation to development. If posts form the key variables in a discourse's unfolding meaning, then manipulating these variables provides some measure of the reader's constructions against the perceived texture of the discourse.

After having extracted these particular frames, I then manipulated them to produce four variously synonymous versions of each essay. The first pair, A1 and B1, contain no post and are therefore without point; A2 (combining three posts) and B2 represent point-early discourse (i.e. bracketed clauses);

A3 and B3, point-late discourse (i.e. bracketed clauses); and A4 and B4, discourse whose point is distributed to some degree (i.e. bracketed and underlined clauses). I suspect the developing essayist begins with discourse approximating A1 and B1, and graduates over time to the equivalent of the fourth versions.

That is, these four versions represent locations on a developmental continuum, with A1 and B1 occasioning leaner, and A4 and B4 richer, accounts of meaning. The point-early and point-late versions exist between the comparative textures of the outer pair. The writer new to the short, argumentative essay often produces information without a centering point; then he learns to center his thinking and drafting with what I earlier called an anchor. In later stages of cognitive development, writers learn, as Williams believes, not only to progressively delay the point, but to anticipate its strongest expression. Point distribution teaches writers to revise for stronger and larger frames--the difference, for example, between A4 and A3.

Now not every writer graduates in any hard and fast linear manner along the continuum I propose. Varying knowledge bases, subjects, and assignment statements, for example, result in discourse featuring widely different representations of point. Every writer, whether as high school or college seniors, must wear many hats. But these variations of Essays A and B do belong on a single continuum and do represent progressively more challenging--and more effective--discourse structures. The maturing writer not only recognizes--and produces--discourse existing between the single-point A3 and distributed-point A4. He also recognizes that strong frames blur the sharp distinction between induction and deduction our textbooks maintain.

I distributed these eight discourses across three populations of colleagues, whom I assumed might be control groups. Specifically, I gave one version of each essay to eight colleagues in English according to this pattern: two received A1 + B4; two others, A2 + B3; two others, A3 + B2; and the final pair, A4 + B1. Secondly, I gave versions of Essay A to eleven colleagues in the Social Sciences Division (two received A1 and groups of three, one of the remaining versions); and versions of Essay B to eleven colleagues in the Life Sciences Division (groups of three receiving one of the first three versions, and two individuals receiving B4).

In all cases I randomly distributed the versions, and no one, to the best of my knowledge, knew that others read and responded to variations on a common theme. I was interested to determine the degree of consensus about the point and frame of a discourse, and the relation, if any, between holistic comment and judgment about a point's development. To do so, I asked everyone to respond in writing to these three questions: 1) What is the main point (claim or thesis) of this piece? 2) Bracket the sentence (or sentences) containing it (if any do), and 3) Briefly evaluate the piece: does it serve (develop) its point (if there is one)? Certainly the first question assumes the presence of a point that, in the case of A1 and B1, is unwarranted.

All of the English Department returned their responses, and over half of my colleagues in Life and Social Sciences returned theirs. The results increase my confidence about our common understanding of short, persuasive discourse; with notable exceptions, the control groups turned out to be control groups. Five of eight English colleagues, for example, bracketed and commented pretty much as I predicted, and two others reacted partially as I predicted.

With A1, both English colleagues felt the point to be implicit at best. With A2, a social work professor, having bracketed its point, comments, "I find the piece unpersuasive because it seems to me disorganized and poorly focussed." This evaluation suggests a familiar structural sag, in which the writer does not fulfill the promise inherent in the early announced point. The deductively shaped piece suffers from inadequate development, as few connections between point and local content exist.

The inadequacies of A3 differ markedly. One English colleague, noting that "the thesis is developed inductively in a very diffuse way," concludes, "the proposal in the last sentence doesn't really deal with all the problems mentioned earlier." A political scientist describes the lack of balance differently: "his last sentence introduces a new thesis which he needs to develop and support in at least a paragraph." For a psychologist, the unsatisfying closure follows from an unclear focus. She recommends that, "using his essay as a resource, he might choose the excitement, media coverage past and present, cost, public support for the program or the role of the astronaut past and present" as his topic, and frame his point accordingly.

Obviously, these respondents criticize the lack of preparation for the point in A3. A4 is also taken to task though not as severely. One English colleague believes "his last body paragraph...is confused; his point is not made clear and this is a crucial section of the essay. Finally, he gives nothing to support his last clause...". By contrast, another judges "the sense of 'another business' in his conclusion has not been drawn clearly throughout this essay. However, the reader does get the gist of what this writer is trying to say even though his claim...is not <u>fully</u> developed" [his underlining]. A historian believes "it does develop its point," but two

others recommend revising for a point-early structure, one specically suggesting that the last paragraph be placed first.

Now professors feel obligated to cite problems and recommend revision in such a scenario. Too, we may resist inductive organization in short, persuasive writing to the degree that the thesis-support format characterizes college pedagogy. Nevertheless, my impression is that A4 earns more praise than do the less mature versions.

The readers' reactions to versions of Essay B, even if we consider it the weaker essay, suggest the validity of the continuum I earlier described. B1 seems immature in that its point is inchoate, or at least absent from the text. One English colleague says of it, "the reader finds that this writer devotes more weight to 'still hunting' than he does to the stand method" [his underlining]. This retrospective view describes a tendency rather than any frame, as if the writer is groping his way towards a point. Another correctly claims that "this essay is simply a loose comparison-contrast that could use a number of generalizations as its thesis."

The second version, featuring the point as second sentence, typifies discourse generated by many short essay assignments in college. An ecologist believes it serves its point; an English colleague notes its "good deductive development, although [the] thesis could include the theme of advantages and disadvantages that the paper develops." This comment implicitly asks for a frame which achieves a higher integration than B2 displays.

That absence of higher integration produces the structural sag we noted with A2, where the discourse does not achieve strong closure. The criticisms of another English colleague point not only to the thinness of B2, but to its likely origins. She states, "the development seems adequate, but the writer

does not seem to be engaged in a genuine 'rhetorical situation'...the writer is playing an academic game ('doing a comparison and contrast paper')." Such comments assume an assignment statement and superficial knowledge of revision common in, for instance, freshman English. A writer announces a point but does not treat it, and the "conclusion" only repeats it.

The third versions of both essays create a contrary structural sag, in which the long-delayed point, in completing the discourse, must distill the cumulative context of meaning, however disparate. This form prompts recommendations for point-early organization--characteristic, of course, of much post-college discourse. Of B3, one chemist comments that "It needs organization, [is] repetitive [and] choppy but does contain sufficient information to support case." Another describes its relative incoherence in deductive terms: "The concluding paragraph seems to reinterate the point that wasn't stated at the beginning of the piece."

An English colleague takes up this observation in more detail in describing the deficiencies of B3's structure. Rightly believing "the thesis is not well established," she adds, "the failure to maintain a specific focus and fixed point of view in the opening paragraphs leaves the reader without a good sense of what stand hunting is all about." Her emphasis on stand hunting testifies to the uncertain direction of the discourse.

By contrast, B4 attempts to frame the point in the beginning, middle, and end of the discourse. All three colleagues evaluating it judge its development favorably (e.g. "It does develop its point, though roughly"; "While it includes some tangential information, this essay does include a fair amount of evidence to support its basic point.")

All these responses indicate a higher degree of consensus than I anticipated; too, it is heartening to discover that colleagues in other disciplines approximate the writing teacher in their analyses of short discourse typified by this pair of essays. The progressively greater demands of each version (e.g. B1 to B4) evidence changing stages in the writer's cognitive development. To teach the value of posts in a discourse is to substantiate a younger writer's understanding of revision: framing discourse means moving away from writing represented by B2 towards--or beyond--writing such as B4.

Similar discourse featuring varying frames should, when examined in gradually larger sections, yield differing accounts of comprehension. If readers primarily depend upon writers' cues in Essays A and B, the fourth versions are probably understood more easily and happily than the first. The presence of posts presumably stabilizes one's unfolding meaning and adumbrates finished meaning. Revision for more effective point distribution firms the connection between tentative and actual (i.e. global) meaning. Such activity not only serves a reader's patterning but increases his confidence.

With four small student populations I used the same four versions of Essays A and B to study the absence or presence of frames in light of statements about comprehension. I wanted to see how increasingly larger pieces of discourse affected readers' views of the point. Would A4 and B4 better serve one's evolving macrostucture than the less mature versions? Too, what effect would the deductively and inductively shaped versions (including B4 against A4) have upon the reader's unfolding sense of the whole? How much more laboriously might the reader's understanding develop in A1 or B1, sans point?

I used two freshman and two mixed junior-senior classes, and divided Essay A into thirds and Essay B into quarters. After passing out the first chunk of discourse (i.e. usually the first two paragraphs) I asked all students to respond in writing to these instructions, two of which echo those I gave colleagues: 1) Does this piece have a main point (thesis) and, if yes, what is it? and 2) If appropriate, bracket the sentecne (or sentences) containing it.

Now students did not know they were not receiving a complete discourse, though the visual arrangement on the page (i.e. presence of considerable white space) might have made them suspect the discourse would continue. Presumably after the first round, they recognized they were receiving larger fractions of a discourse. But as with my colleagues, students did not know they read calculated variations on a common theme. I distributed the four versions evenly across each class. After collecting the first set of responses I distributed what amounted to the first half (or two-thirds of some version of Essay A or B, repeated the same two instructions as before, and added a third: (if appropriate) Has your view of the point changed any? If so, how?

Thus, each pass, or round, elicited a brief statement, but the aggregate data seem inconclusive, as few clear patterns of response emerge. This may be due to several reasons, among them flaws in my verbal instructions. For example, students think the teacher's first instruction probably assumes the presence of a point, whether or not such is the case. More substantial reasons concern the students' knowledge bases. Many do not appreciate the distinction between primarily argumentative and primarily informative discourse.

In spite of their instruction and own production, many cannot distinguish between a report and an essay. They confuse topic, or issue, with point, if point means the telos of the discourse explicitly signaled by a clause or clauses; and the writer's personal reaction, or comment--the disclosure of attitude. Most respondents followed the second instruction unambiguously and used it to cue their response to the first instruction, seemingly reversing order and replicating--via direct quotation or paraphrase--what was bracketed. Too, many insufficiently responded to the third instruction if they felt the point had changed.

Most students did not perceive discourse structure as did colleagues. Their apparent confusion counters my peers' understanding. But their data blur the distinction between the factual and the opinionated sometimes perpetuated by our textbooks and ourselves. A point might appear a fact at another level of analysis. Student response notwithstanding, bracketing post sentences in discourse has substantial pedagogical applications. It teaches writers-as-readers the value of framing discourse, as it opens to them the possibility of scrutinizing parts to whole. Too, it teaches them the need for connections between their global predictions and the writer's network of likely meaning.

Without post sentences, a reader faces greater difficulty adjusting the changing surface of discourse to his growing sense of the whole. Too, he adjusts his sense of the whole more laboriously. A central research question combining both focuses - parts to whole and the changing whole - concerns the shifting meaning of old and new at the macrostructural level. Obviously, when one studies a discourse such as Essay B in stages, formerly new meaning becomes both old and new. On the third pass of a version of Essay B, for

example, paragraphs one-four represent stable, familiar meaning since they are repeated verbatim.

But they are unfamiliar in that they are now seen as part of a discourse including paragraphs five and six - a new and larger context. So the new transforms, to some degree, the old. Given this continual transformation and expansion in old meaning, how revisionist are mature readers in expressing a discourse's point and possible frame? My students, with some version of Essay A or B, only superficially revised their view of global meaning.

However, most all spotlighted the new material, the most recent paragraphs in a pass, as if those contained the point or major frame. This proved true regardless of the discourse structure, and might seem most surprising with A2 and B2, the point-early versions. Such a finding not only confirms the generally passive, retrospective reader described by Olson, Mack, and Duffy, and others. It explains the power and prevalence of point-late discourse among professional writers of short argumentation such as newspaper columnists. Readers favor the new, and over time, increasingly socialized writers migrate their points downward and forward.

Deflecting attention from point placement to point distribution, then, leads writers to greater versatility in discourse structure. Too, it sensitizes them to the collaborative activity of readers and writers. If revision comes to be seen as building stronger frames and enlarging the point, then revision becomes a substantial, rather than superficial, dimension of writing.

Notes

[1]In this article I am focussing upon this broadly defined form of written discourse commonplace in the academy. Too, I treat "point" and "thesis" as synonyms, though recognizing some distinction between them.

[2]Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," CCC, XXXI, 4 (1980), 382-3.

[3]Applebee, Contexts for Learning to Write (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1984), 102, 117.

[4]Williams, "Critical Thinking, Cognitive Development, and the Teaching of Writing," talk given at Penn State University, 29 June 1983. More recently, Williams has reiterated this point: "Not only does this [point-last] structure demand a greater engagement from the reader, but it makes possible a richer and more complex unfolding of the point, so that the reader gets the point only after it has already been fully developed." Greg Colomb and Williams, "Perceiving Structure in Professional Prose: A Multiply-Determined Experience," 1985, ms., 34.

[5]Colomb and Williams, "Perceiving Structure."

[6]Gary Olson, Robert Mack, and Susan Duffy, "Cognitive Aspects of Genre," Poetics 10 (1981), 310-11. Louise W. Phelps makes the same point more recently in her sixth generalization characterizing a model of reading. See "Dialectics of Coherence: Toward an Integrative Theory," CE Vol. 47 No. 1, (January 1985), 20.

[7]In the phenomenology of reading, the borders between inductive and deductive structures disappear. Marie Secor observes, "the terms induction and deduction, though useful to describe variations in the arrangement of arguments (that is, whether the thesis comes at the beginning or at the end), do not really describe modes of argument or separate contrasting ways the mind operates, and the exact distinction between the two is a matter of some controversy among theorists." ("Modes of Thinking, Modes of Argument," in The Writer's Mind: Writing as a Mode of Thinking, Janice Hays, Phyllis Roth, Jan Ramsey, Robert Foulke, eds. (Urbana, Ill: NCTE, 1983, 69). Thus, point distribution seems a more accurate, though more complex, concept than point placement.